

With him is Anna, his English tutor, whose son asks her the question, "Was he as good . . . as he could have been?" Anna answers wistfully, "I don't think any man has ever been as good . . . as he could have been—but this one [really] tried."⁵

The Prophet Joseph declared, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God."⁵

Let us walk these clearly defined paths. To help us do so we can follow the shortest sermon in the world. It can be found on a common traffic sign. It reads, "Keep Right."

"Do you work for God?"

This advice was found and followed by Joe, who had been asked to get up at six in the morning and drive a crippled child 50 miles to a hospital. He didn't want to do it, but he didn't know how to say no. A woman carried the child out to the car and set him next to the driver's seat, mumbling thanks through her tears. Joe said everything would be all right and drove off quickly.

After a mile or so, the child inquired shyly, "You're God, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid not, little fellow," replied Joe.

"I thought you must be God," said the child. "I heard Mother praying next to my bed and asking God to help me get

to the hospital, so I could get well and play with the other boys. Do you work for God?"

"Sometimes, I guess," said Joe, "but not regularly. I think I'm going to work for Him a lot more from now on."

My brethren, will you? Will I? Will we? I pray humbly, yet earnestly, that we will. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Moroni 4:3.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1937, 35, 38.
4. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *The King and I* (1951).
5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 255-56.

President Hinckley

President James E. Faust and President Thomas S. Monson of the First Presidency have just spoken to us.

The Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 tomorrow morning. We should be in our places at about 9:15.

Daylight saving time, we remind you, begins tomorrow at 2:00 A.M. Move your clocks ahead, or you will miss half the conference.

We express our gratitude to this wonderful chorus from BYU, which has sung to us. Following my remarks they will sing again "The Spirit of God," and the benediction will then be offered by Elder Richard E. Cook of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My dear brethren, it is a tremendous honor and responsibility to speak to you. I pray the Lord will bless me.

Priesthood is tremendous brotherhood

What a tremendous brotherhood this is, composed of hundreds of thousands of

men and boys who have been ordained to the priesthood of God. What a mighty concourse this would be if we were all to come together in one great gathering. It would astonish the world. There is nothing like it of which I am aware.

Priesthood is the backbone of Church

You are the backbone of the Church, my brethren. From your ranks come the bishops and branch presidents, the district and stake presidents, the Area Authority Seventies, and all of the General Authorities.

You young men are the substance of a great missionary program whose influence is felt throughout the world. Altogether, you are men and boys who have taken on the whole armor of God to move forward His work in the earth.

Whenever we gather in one of these meetings, I am sorry that we cannot accommodate all who wish to come. From the moment the doors of the Tabernacle were opened tonight, there was a flood of young men and their fathers. Hopefully the new hall will be finished a year from now, and we will be able to accommodate all who wish to come.

And to you brethren who are taking advantage of the broadcast and satellite transmission of these proceedings, we feel at one with you.

I think, my brethren, that our Father in Heaven smiles down upon us. I think it must be of great comfort to Him to look upon the hundreds of thousands of men and boys who love Him, who carry in their hearts a testimony of Him and His Beloved Son, who give leadership and direction to His Church, who stand as heads of families where there is righteousness and where truth is taught and exemplified.

We have become a great body of men, young and old. There is scarcely anything we cannot accomplish if we work unitedly together with one mind and one purpose and one heart.

Realize the importance of priesthood

I hope that each of us is aware of the tremendous thing that has come to us with ordination to the priesthood. This is the authority of God in the earth. It comes from Him as a divine bestowal. It carries with it the power and the authority to govern in the affairs of the Church. It carries with it the power and the authority to bless in the name of the Lord, to lay hands upon the sick and call down the powers of heaven. It is sacred and holy. It partakes of the divine. Its authority is expressed in mortality and reaches beyond the veil of death.

I hope we are worthy of the priesthood we bear. I plead with you, every one of you, to conduct your lives in such a way as to be worthy of it.

Rise above the evils of the world

As we have been reminded, this is a season of great evil in the world. No one needs to be reminded of that. We are constantly exposed to the muck and filth of pornography, to salacious and evil behavior totally unbecoming anyone who holds the priesthood of God.

It is a challenge to work in the world and live above its filth.

Dishonesty is rampant. It is manifest in cheating that goes on in schools, in businesses that rob and defraud. Temptations are everywhere about us; unfortunately, some succumb to these.

Brethren, be strong. Rise above the evils of the world. We need not be prudish. We need not adopt a holier-than-thou attitude. We need only let our personal integrity, our sense of right and wrong, and simple honesty govern our actions.

Let us live the gospel in our homes. Let there be an honest manifestation of love between husbands and wives, between children and their parents. Control the voice of anger. Be absolutely loyal one to another.

Do what is right

Simply "do what is right [and] let the consequence follow" (*Hymns*, no. 237). So live that each morning you may kneel in prayer, seeking the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as well as its protective power, as you go about your work of the day. So live that each night, before retiring, you may come before the Lord in prayer without shame or embarrassment or the need to plead for forgiveness. I do not hesitate to say that God will bless you if you will do so. Someday you will grow old and look back upon your life. You will be able to say: "I lived with integrity. I cheated no one, not even myself. I reveled in the companionship of my wife, who is the mother of our children. I am proud of those children. I am grateful to God for His manifest blessings."

If such can be your lot, I promise that when the shades of old age gather about you, there will be tears of gratitude in your eyes and the throbbing of a thankful heart beating in your breast.

Gratitude for bishops

Now, some years ago, more than 10 years ago, I spoke from this pulpit concerning the bishops of the Church. I wish to return briefly to that subject again tonight.

I carry in my heart a deep appreciation for our bishops. I am profoundly grateful for the revelation of the Almighty under which this office was created and functions.

Church organization effective in crisis

As all of you are aware, last fall a terrible storm hit Central America. For six days and nights, Hurricane Mitch locked in over that area and particularly over Honduras. The winds blew ferociously, and the rains fell without letup.

Rivers swelled and took with them houses that had been built along their banks. More than 200 bridges were washed out in Honduras, destroying means of travel. The soil from the highlands washed towards the sea in a deluge of filthy mud. Houses were filled to the tops of the windows. Yards and streets were filled. People fled in terror, leaving all behind them.

One of our bishops secured a big truck and went about gathering his people, taking them to higher ground. When the truck could no longer get through, he somehow secured a boat. He was looking after his flock.

I went down there to see what had happened and to give comfort, where possible. I beheld a miracle. I witnessed in operation the simple and marvelously effective organization of this Church.

Every member of this Church has a bishop or a branch president. I have only commendation for other relief efforts which came in from across the world. But I have unending admiration for the wonderful manner in which the Church operated. The bishops appealed to their stake presidents, who appealed to the Area Presidency, who appealed to headquarters here in Salt Lake City. Within hours great quantities of basic food-stuffs, medicine, and clothing were on their way from our storehouses.

A warehouse was rented in San Pedro Sula in the area of the greatest damage. It was the bishops who marshaled their people to work shifts in the warehouse putting into plastic bags enough food to take care of a family for a week, clothing to put on their backs, medicine to safeguard them against disease. Every bishop knew his own people. He, with his Relief Society president, knew their needs. These were not faceless strangers working as employees of government. They were friends, each a member of a ward family small enough that they knew one

another's needs. There was no argument, no greedy grasping for food and clothing. Everything was orderly. It was systematic. It was friendly. It was motivated by love and concern, and it was done quickly to meet an immediate need. It was the gospel at work in a quiet and magnificent manner.

The waters finally subsided, but mud was left in a thick and ugly coating on everything. Nothing became more valuable than shovels and wheelbarrows. And together, again under the direction of the bishops, the mud was cleaned from the houses.

We visited a meetinghouse on a Saturday. There were many people there, with a bishop, a loving father to his flock, giving direction. The pews, which had been floating in the water, were taken out and carefully cleaned. Mud was scraped from the walls and the floors. Then the mops came out and the polishing cloths, and before nightfall that Saturday evening, the building had been made ready for worship services on the Sabbath.

I stand in humble gratitude and respect and admiration for the bishops of this Church. In the most dire of circumstances, I watched them in La Lima, Honduras. I spoke with them, shook their hands, loved them. How thankful I am for these men who, without regard for their own comfort, give of their time, of their wisdom, of their inspiration in presiding over our wards throughout the world. They receive no compensation other than the love of their people. There is no rest for them on the Sabbath nor very much at other times. They are the ones closest to the people, best acquainted with their needs and circumstances.

Requirements of bishops

The requirements of their office are today as they were in the days of Paul, who wrote to Timothy:

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

"Not given to wine, no striker [that is, not a bully or a violent person], . . . not a brawler, not covetous" (1 Timothy 3:2-3).

In his letter to Titus, Paul adds that "a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; . . .

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7, 9).

Example of a bishop's influence

All during the years of my childhood and youth, even until the time I was ordained an elder and came home from a mission, I had only one bishop. He was a remarkable man. He served for 25 years. We knew him, and he knew us. We always addressed him as "Bishop Duncan," and he always called us by our first names. We had great respect for him—an almost awesome respect. But we had no fear of him. We knew that he was our friend. His was a very large ward, and how very well he served his people.

I spoke at his funeral. Next to my own father, he probably had the greatest influence on my young life. How grateful I am for him.

Since then, I have had a number of bishops. Without exception, every one of them has been a dedicated and inspired leader.

Role of bishops

Now let me say a few words directly to the bishops who are with us this night. And much of what I say to you might be echoed to the stake presidents and others in similar callings. I hope you know that I carry in my heart a great feeling of love for you. I know that your people love you. Tremendous is your trust. In calling you we have placed in you our total confidence.

We expect you to stand as the presiding high priest of the ward, a counselor to the people, a defender and helper of those in trouble, a comfort to those in sorrow, a supplier to those in need. We expect you to stand as a guardian and protector of the doctrine that is taught in your ward, of the quality of the teaching, of the filling of the many offices which are necessary.

Your personal behavior must be impeccable. You must be a man of integrity, above reproach of any kind. Your example will set the tone for the direction your people follow. You must be fearless in denouncing evil, willing to take a stand for the right, uncompromising in your defense of truth. While all of this requires firmness, it must be done with kindness and love.

You are the father of the ward and the guardian of your people. You must reach out to them in their times of sorrow and sickness and distress. You stand as president of the Aaronic Priesthood and with your counselors must give leadership to the deacons and the teachers and the priests to see that they grow in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

You are a husband to your wife, her beloved companion, her protector and provider. You are a father to your children and must nurture them with love and teach them with appreciation.

You may expect that the adversary will work on you. You, of all men, must exercise self-discipline, standing far apart from sin and evil of any kind in your own life. You must shun pornography, shut off the television set when it carries salacious entertainment, be pure in thought and deed.

You cannot use your office to further your business interests among your people, lest some accuse you of benefiting from your service as bishop.

You stand as a common judge in Israel. This is almost a terrifying responsibility. In some instances, you must determine even the eligibility of your people

to be members of the Church. You must determine their worthiness to receive baptism, their worthiness to be ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood, their eligibility to serve missions, and above all, their qualifications to enter the house of the Lord and partake of the blessings there to be had. You are to see that none goes hungry or without clothing or shelter. You must know the circumstances of all over whom you preside.

You must be a comforter and a guide to your people. Your door must be ever open to any cries of distress. Your back must be strong in sharing their burdens. You must reach out in love even to the wrongdoer.

Blessing for bishops

My brethren, I invoke the blessings of the Almighty upon you in the great responsibility which you carry. May God bless you with health and strength. May He touch your mind with wisdom and understanding, with appreciation and love. May the interests of your people be the dominant concern of your life, without sacrificing the demands of your employment or the proper attention given your family.

I thank the Lord for each of you. I love you for what you do. I pray for you, every one of you, wherever you may be. I plead with you to shield yourselves from the darts of the adversary. I counsel you to put on the whole armor of God.

May the blessings of heaven come down upon your wives and your children. Someday you will be released. That will be a day of sadness. The memories of your people will remain throughout your life. They will sanctify your days and bring peace and rest and gladness. God bless you my beloved brethren, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "The Spirit of God."
Elder Richard E. Cook offered the benediction.
